



Places to Go: Stewart Island

STEWART Island is one of those places that so many Kiwis have always wanted to go to but, so few of us have actually been. I'm fortunate to be able to count the number of times I have been on at least one hand - of which two occasions were when I was a child. This created a long lasting memory of beauty and fun. Flying into Stewart Island will no doubt be on every pilot's bucket list so here are a few pointers about how to achieve this successfully.

As with any expedition the first step is planning the trip. There are great options for accommodation ranging from backpackers to holiday homes, though prices can be at a premium in the summer months and most businesses have cancellation policies which are not ideal for the typical flyers last minute anti-cyclonic dash. One popular option is the iconic South Sea Hotel which has always had a strong footing in Island life. I remember as a youngster that the hotel used to brew its own beer. Nowadays it has a great bar and restaurant and one look at their menu would encourage any seafood lover to book in. Hotel rooms start at \$65. Self catering holiday batches start at about \$120 per night and are great value for a group of people. We stayed in one which was ideal with 3 rooms, 2 bathrooms, the best view and a short walk to the hotel.

Once you have booked in, (and explained you are subject to weather and that you would therefore like to avoid any unknown cancellation fees), the next step is to familiarise yourself with the area. Ryans Creek airfield can be a bit of a handful, especially in inclement weather. Therefore the operator; Stewart Island Flights requires anyone intending to fly in there, to have a briefing with them first. Ph: 03 218 9129.

This involves visiting them at the Invercargill airport terminal. Phone ahead first and they will instruct you where to park - an easy walk from their operation. Once inside you may be lucky enough to be greeted with not only warm smiles but tea and homemade cupcakes - as we were. Their briefing is interesting and thorough which takes the guess work out of the trip across Foveaux Strait, making for a much more relaxing trip. The landing fee is \$40 at time of print and transport by van to the township can be arranged at this point too.

Aircraft arriving on RWY 22 or taking



Ryan's Creek Airstrip.



Stewart Island Wharf at Halfmoon Bay.



The South Sea Hotel.



Breakfast on the wharf.

off on RWY 04 should keep a good look out for helicopters operating from the nearby helipad and watch out for wind shear. At the field there are tie down points in the seal so be sure to take your

tie downs. The weather is very changeable at the Island, so do tie the plane down and control lock it well. Ideally two nights are better than one but do take the weather forecast into account so you can have peace of mind during your stay.

Fishing tour options may bring a lovely catch to your own table and I definitely recommend going out if time permits. They are mainly operated by ex-commercial fishermen with all gear supplied. Fishing is also allowed from the end of wharves and jetties which will give the kids endless hours of fun catching Spotties.

If you prefer to dine out instead of cooking at home, try the hotel. Look at www.stewart-island.co.nz and select the menu page. It will have you planning your Stewart Island trip right then and there. (I tried that and it works! Ed.) We tried The Church Hill Restaurant & Oyster Bar which is a cute cottage style place with 3 separate dining areas, including a deck. They serve traditional Stewart Island food which includes of course huge oysters and other delights such as blue cod. The atmosphere is rustic and fun and it is an enjoyable short walk from the town centre. Make a reservation to avoid being disappointed after walking up the hill.

For things to do, you will find many. I highly recommend a trip to Ulva Island. A 10 minute trip from Golden Bay, this is an untouched part of the world with opportunities to see rare bird life, such as the Rifleman, the Saddleback and the Kiwi close up. There are rental cars available on the Island but the tour operators will provide transport if you book with them so we just used our feet most of the time. For those on a time frame, a quick visit to the Rakiura museum is a must, only a short walk but very informative.

The island has a population of around 390 and it is home to the Titi (mutton bird) which along with abundant fish, provided a rich food source to early Maori. The 19th century saw settlers arrive and marriage with local Maori women created strong family and cultural links.

As you tear yourself away from this gem of NZ, allow some extra time to fly southwest to Masons Bay, as to see the island from above is rather extraordinary. You'll realise just how isolated and untouched this beautiful place is. For more information visit www.stewartisland.co.nz

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